



ESSAY

Why is the resettlement in a third-country the chosen solution by the Bhutanese refugees? A personal answer to a political problem

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ABSTRACT. This paper gives voice to the motivations that drove thousands of Ethnic Nepalis from Bhutan to choose resettlement as a solution to their never-ending plight. Expelled by their own country where they started to be perceived as a source of instability in the 1980s, the Bhutanese refugees have found refuge in Nepal for the last 20 years, surviving an inhospitable policy reluctant to integrate them. From 2007, the governments of Denmark, Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and the United States started to host the Bhutanese refugees willing to be resettled in a third-country. Since 300 Bhutanese refugees are currently living in Denmark, we decided to interview the 41 resettled in Haslev, a town in Faxe municipality, about 60 km from Copenhagen. Although refugees are generally perceived as a passive object of humanitarian assistance, our findings show people that they are aware of the difficulty to be repatriated, willing to end a life of idleness in the camps, hoping for a better future and craving for citizenship, and hence the refugees have actively chosen to start over in a foreign country despite the hardships that they had to encounter. The resettlement in fact proves to be a long process that does not end with the arrival of refugees, but it actually continues in the host state.

Introduction

Coming from Bhutan, a tiny country deep buried in the Himalayas, the ethnic Nepalis became refugees without attracting the world's attention. The ethnic Nepalis started to be perceived as a political and cultural threat in the 1980s, when the then King implemented a policy of 'Bhutanization' aimed at strengthening the national identity of his Kingdom. The consequence was the beginning of a series of discrimination that ended up with expelling the ethnic Nepalis from their own country in the end of the 1990s. Nepal became sanctuary for 108,897 registered Bhutanese refugees, and

Bhutan with a population of 635,000 inhabitants, became the place where every sixth citizen is a refugee (Norwegian Refugee Council 2008: 3).

From 1993 to 2003, 15 bilateral talks between Nepal and Bhutan were held without bringing any results: the first has never accepted to integrate the ethnic Nepalis within their territories, and the second has never allowed the right to return to one of the refugees who, in the meantime, were included amongst the so-called Protracted Refugee Situations. The proposal of voluntary resettlement in a third country—which was made by Denmark, Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and the United States that are united in the Core Working Group—has been the only bright spot so far and started to be implemented in 2007. More than 32,000 refugees have been resettled to date, of which 300 have been resettled in Denmark and 41 in Haslev, a town in Faxe municipality, about 60 km from Copenhagen. The Bhutanese refugees resettled in Haslev are the targets of this paper. We asked them to explain the reasons behind their decision to be voluntarily resettled in a third-country so that the micro-case of their experiences will lead us to understand the macro-case of the resettlement process.

Bhutan in the South Asian Context

First of all, it is necessary to situate Bhutan in the broader context of South Asia to understand influences and roots of its ethnic Nepalis refugees' impasse. Since 1947, an average of 40 million people have crossed the borders of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal as a consequence of 12 massive bilateral flows which have transformed the geo-political aspects of the South Asian regions. Rejected peoples, political refugees from repressive regimes, and unwanted migrants form the South Asian displaced population, whose diverse statuses are yet characterized by a connecting red-line: a common *threat perception* which “arises when migration changes the linguistic or religious composition of the sending or receiving locality” (Weiner 1993: 1744).

In Bhutan for example, the ethnic Nepalis who migrated to the southern area of the country since the 19th century, started to be perceived by the Bhutanese authorities as a cultural, political, and economic threat. The reaction of Bhutan stems from the fear towards a minority whose sense of identity grows corresponding its small entity (Weiner 1993: 1744). The *identity* takes the shape of solidarity amongst the members of the same ethnic group in response to the sovereignty of the state which cannot help but embody “notions of citizenship and exclusion, distinctions between those who belong and those who do not” (Weiner 1993: 1744).

Bhutan and the (Forgotten) History of its Refugees

Sandwiched between China to the North and India to the West, East and South, Bhutan is a small country with a population that can be divided into three major ethnic groups: the Ngalongs¹ in the Central and Western part of the country are of Tibetan origins who are Buddhist and speak Dzongkha; the Sharchhops in Eastern Bhutan are of Indo-Burmese descendants; and together with the Ngalongs are the Drukpas who share the same religion and language. The Lhotshampas (which literally means “people of the South”) are ethnic Nepalis who migrated from Nepal around 1850. Mainly of Hindu ancestors, they live in the lowlands of Southern Bhutan, speak

Nepali and believe in Hinduism, differing from the Drukpas in terms of culture, language and religion.

Although the ethnic Nepalis² were collectively granted citizenship under the 1958 Nationality Law, the rise to power of Nepali migrants in the neighbour state of Sikkim in 1975, created anxiety on the Bhutanese authority who did not consider the ethnic Nepalis as citizens but as illegal immigrants (Weiner 1993: 1744). As a consequence, a series of measures aimed at tightening the eligibility for Bhutanese citizenship was taken. Two new Citizenship Acts in 1977 and 1985 introduced restrictive requirements to obtain nationality, increasing the residency criteria for citizenship by 10, 15 and 20 years (Human Rights Watch [HRW] 2007: 14). A census was organized in 1988: conducted only in the South, the census considered Bhutanese citizens only those ethnic Nepalis who could prove, with records as tax receipts, residency in the country in 1958, the year of the first Nationality Law (HRW 2007: 15). In addition, the so-called “One Nation, One People” policy, with the purpose of preserving and maintaining the Bhutanese national identity, was indicated as one of the objectives of the sixth Five Year Plan in 1987 (Norwegian Refugee Council 2008: 4). The ‘Bhutanization’ of the country included the dictation of the Dzongkha language (and thus the removal of the Nepali language from all the schools in Southern Bhutan) and of the *driglam namzha*, the traditional Drukpa code of values, dress, and etiquette (HRW 2007: 15).

The ethnic Nepalis felt to be victims of what “resembled a process of ethnic cleansing” (Norwegian Refugee Council 2008: 2), and organized mass demonstrations in September and October 1990. The authorities responded violently: a considerable number of the thousands of participants were imprisoned and tortured and, at the end of 1990, the first ethnic Nepalis were forced by the government to leave the country, signing, under duress, the so-called “voluntary migration forms” (HRW 2007: 16). Those who were not forced as such, left the country voluntarily because of the discrimination they were subjected to (HRW 2007: 27). Some settled in India, but the majority settled in Nepal, becoming part of what is defined as a Protracted Refugee Situation.

Bhutan: A Protracted Refugee Situation

According to the definition given by the UNHCR (2006: 106), a Protracted Refugee Situation (PRS) is a “refugee population of 25,000 persons or more who have been in exile for five or more years in developing countries”. A PRS stems from a ‘failure’ which involves the country of origin, the country of first asylum and the international community: the first, being the source of fear from which the refugees flee; the second, avoiding most of the times integration within its territories; and the third, neglecting the age-old PRS in preference for refugees emergency in the glare of publicity (UNHCR 2006: 109-114).

Bhutan and its thousands of ethnic Nepalis present the necessary numbers and characteristics to be considered a PRS. Bhutan has been accused of having denied the citizenship rights to almost half of its population, forced large amounts of people to flee and discriminated the remainees (Norwegian Refugee Council 2008: 2). Nepal has been the country of first asylum for the majority of the Ethnic Nepalis who found a shelter in the South-East of this country, but to date, despite sharing the same language, religion and customs, it is still reluctant to assimilate the refugee population and it has even denied the possibility of starting income-generating activities within

the camp's borders (HRW 2007: 55). That is the reason why the ethnic Nepalis have not had any chance but to rely on international donors to survive. However, as it happens in most parts of the PRS, the ethnic Nepalis also suffer a 'donor fatigue'. On December 2006, the World Food Program (WFP) doubted that it could provide assistance to finance its food aid programs and the UNHCR also had to limit its service, once given to all the refugee population, only to the most vulnerable. In a limbo within a limbo, "the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal are trapped between their forced dependency on international assistance and the increasing reluctance of the international community to keep providing for their needs" (HRW 2007: 19).

In order to resolve a PRS, humanitarian assistance has to come along with political and diplomatic actions (UNHCR 2006: 114). Being neighbours as well as political and economic allies, Nepal and India could be the ones who can more easily influence Bhutan's approach to the ethnic Nepalis. However, India has maintained a neutral approach towards the Bhutanese refugees' issue, motivated by its need for the Bhutanese hydro-power³, whereas the Nepal-Bhutan bilateral cooperation has not evolved significantly for reasons explained in the next section.

Bhutan and Nepal: A Never-Ending Bilateral Talk

Despite the fact that Nepal and Bhutan share historical and cultural links, the two countries' relationships have been distant for many decades. The lack of economic interaction can be easily justified by an absence of common borders and the incumbent presence of India between the two. It was only in 1983 that Nepal and Bhutan start diplomatic relationships joining the SAARC (South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation). But it was with the blast of the discrimination policy against the Ethnic Nepalis in Bhutan and their subsequent flight into Nepal that the two countries initiate a partnership which aims at finding an amicable solution to the refugees' impasse (Baral 1993: 198).

According to NGO reports, the first groups of 2,500 Ethnic Nepalis were illegally camped in Nepal by August 1991. On September of the same year, 6000 refugees were already under the shelters of UNHCR, which registered a refugee population of 62,000 people on August 1992, growing to 80,000 people by June 1993. Statistics from UNHCR, which was released on April 2001, counted a total of 108,897 Bhutanese refugees—98,897 of which have been assisted by UNHCR in the seven camps situated in Eastern Nepal (Rajesh 2003: 287), while an estimate 10,000 - 15,000 Bhutanese have settled outside the camps (HRW 2007: 73).

The first of the fifteen bilateral talks that were carried out in a time frame of ten years was held on October 1993. By common consent, Bhutan and Nepal categorized the people of the camp in four different groups: Bhutanese who have been forcefully evicted; Bhutanese who have voluntarily emigrated; non-Bhutanese; and Bhutanese who have committed criminal acts.⁴

Bhutan initially agreed upon the repatriation of the first category of refugees, but denied it on a second thought, and in the following years, the negotiations between Nepal and Bhutan came to a standstill that lasted until 1999. In 2000, the two countries constituted a Joint Verification Team (JVT), which sorted out the refugee population of just one of the seven camps. The results were released after two years and concluded by considering that: only 2.4 per cent, out of a total of 12,643 refugees registered in the camp were in the first category; 70.55 per cent in the second; 24.2 per cent in the third; and 2.85 per cent in the fourth. According to an agreement

stipulated by Bhutan and Nepal in 2003, the first category of Bhutanese is entitled to be repatriated and get back their citizenship; the second category has to re-apply for citizenship once these refugees are back in Bhutan; and the fourth category have to stand trial in Bhutan, while Bhutanese of the third category are denied to go back to Bhutan at all (HRW 2007: 41).

However, despite decisions taken and agreement signed, none of the Ethnic Nepalis have been repatriated so far and no negotiation between Bhutan and Nepal has been held since 2003. Eventually, Bhutan's categorization system and verification procedures have been strongly criticized by the international community for not allowing the right of return to its own citizens and for not meeting the standards for refugee screening and verification.⁵

Resettlement: A Solution of Last Resort

It was only in 2005 that Denmark, Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and the United States tried to find a solution to the Bhutanese refugee issue, by organizing themselves under the Core Working Group (CWG). In 2006, Ellen Sauerbrey, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration, announced the willingness of the United States to resettle 60,000 of the Bhutanese refugees living in Nepal. In 2007, the other CWG countries accepted to resettle smaller number of refugees. According to the webpage of the Embassy of Denmark in Kathmandu⁶, as of June 2010, more than 32,000 refugees⁷ from Bhutan have been resettled in CWG countries. Denmark has received more than 300 refugees to date and has committed to accept up to 150 refugees from Bhutan annually in the next few years. The Lutheran World Federation Nepal (the implementing partner of UNHCR and WFP to address the Bhutanese refugee issue), with whom we have been in contact for writing this paper, informed us that the resettlement option has been generally welcomed by the refugee population: that is, almost 80 per cent have in fact shown interest to be resettled.

Considerations on Methodology

Given the topicality of resettlement, the involvement of Denmark and the possibility to interview the Bhutanese resettled not so far from our home, we decided to look at the resettlement from the eyes of the people directly involved. We came in contact with the Bhutanese refugees through Durga Adhakari, who can be considered the representative of the Bhutanese community resettled in Haslev. Mr. Adhakari arranged the interviews with the refugees and took us to their apartments in a continuous interviewing process that was held on May 4th 2011, and lasted an entire afternoon for about seven hours.

Gender and age were regarded as crucial aspects for choosing our interviewees. The gender dimension was taken into consideration with the purpose of "identifying women's and men's different vulnerabilities" (IASC 2006: 1-2), whereas age was chosen as parameter because of its important role in the perception of the resettlement process and degree of assimilation to "cultural incompatibilities" (Kunz 1981: 51) of the host country. Consequently, our aim was to interview the same number of men and the same number of women, but of different age groups. We considered also to interview children born in the camps in order to analyze their perception of a home-country where they have never been. In the end, we have been able to interview a total

of 11 people: 5 males, 4 females and 2 children. Although we deem our sample exhaustive and responding to the purpose of our research, we do still reckon the number of interviews taken limited.

We conducted our interviews according to a qualitative research method. Our interview guide was basically designed on eight broad questions regarding the resettlement issue. The questions were focused on:

- The reason for choosing resettlement;
- Perception of good and bad aspects of the resettlement policy;
- Relationship with the home country and the resettlement country.

All the interviews have been recorded in Nepali and transcribed into English. Chronological sequence, name, gender, age, year of flight from Bhutan, period of time spent in the refugee camps and year of resettlement of the interviewees, are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Chronological sequence	Name	Gender	Age	Year of flight from Bhutan	Period of time spent in refugee camp (in years)	Date of resettlement
1 Male	Durga Parsad Adhakari	M	41	1993	14	04-apr-08
2 Male	Kamal Koirala	M	34	4 Jan 1991	18	10-feb-09
1 Female	Bal Kumari Adhakari	F	36	4 Jan 1991	18	04-apr-08
1 Child	Yogesh Adhakari	M	12	Born in Nepal's camp	9	2008
3 Male	Umakanta Adhakari	M	65	1991	18	17-sept -08
2 Female	Naina Kala Adhakari	F	52	Don't remember	18	2009
3 Female	Bineeta Adhakari	F	29	1991	18	2009
4 Male	Chasy Tamang	M	85	1992	17	06-oct-09
2 Child	Aakash Tamang	M	13	Born in India's camp	8	06-oct- 09
5 Male	Govinaa Neoupaney	M	22	Don't remember	19	6-oct-09
4 Female	Krishna Maya Neupane	F	50	1992	17	06-oct-09

The mass of information collected during the interviews had been clustered around four recurrent themes that will be presented in the following four sections.

“We will never get back our land....”

According to Lok Raj Baral (1993: 203), one of the most influential Nepali political analyst, the attitude shown by the Bhutanese government towards the refugee issue, is “characterized by a sense of paranoia”, generated from the regime’s “vulnerability and fears” (Baral 1993: 201) that the political and cultural dominant minority of Bhutan, the Drukpas, would be jeopardized by the Ethnic Nepalis minority, whose language, religion and culture is completely different. Such a paranoid behaviour has also been perceived by the Bhutanese resettled in Haslev which, in the course of our interviews, has been referred to it as a “loss of senses” (Interviews, Haslev, 4 May

2011). After the 1990 mass demonstration organized by the Ethnic Nepalis claiming their citizenship rights back, the government believes to be the victim of a terrorist movement which “threatens the very sovereignty and integrity of Bhutan and its survival as a nation” (Baral 1993: 201). Behind the insecurity and fear showed by Bhutan, Baral has seen a pragmatic and calculated willingness to “protect its elite against a worldwide trend toward democratization”, labelling all the Ethnic Nepalis as *ngolopos* (anti-nationals), Bhutan can hide its “ethnic cleansing” behind the curtain of a security problem, helped by “the remoteness of their country, manipulable media, ... and the blessings of giant Southern neighbour that obligingly turns a blind eye” (Baral 1993: 201).

The possible solutions to a refugee crisis are three: voluntary repatriation to the home country, settlement in the country of first asylum or resettlement in a third country. Of these three solutions, UNHCR’s Executive Committee has constantly affirmed that “voluntary repatriation, in safety and dignity, where and when feasible, remains the most preferred solution in the majority of refugee situations” (HRW 2007: 39). The majority of the refugees interviewed are of like mind:

If there was the condition to choose to go back to Bhutan, if we will be welcomed by Bhutanese regime and if they will give back our properties and land, I definitely will choose to go back to Bhutan. (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

Although the right to return is protected by Article 13(2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and by Article 12(4) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, several of Bhutan’s legislative provisions state that a person who voluntarily leaves his country and his properties automatically renounces his citizenship. A large number of ethnic Nepalis actually signed a voluntary migration form that implied surrendering their nationality, but most of the signatories were forced to sign the form and forced to leave their country to avoid physical harassment and imprisonment (HRW 2007: 42). The arbitrary deprivation of nationality has caused the expulsion of the Ethnic Nepalis from their own country and justified the denying of their right to return in front of Bhutan’s authorities (Amnesty International 2000: 17).

Statistical data show that two-thirds of the world’s 20 million refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced people are hosted in developing countries (Obi 2010: 129) and that only 3 per cent find refuge in the developed ones. Despite such an irrelevant migratory flow, the latter still looks at it as an intimidating menace to their security, an approach to migration which holds the name of securitization (Obi 2010: 138). Nevertheless, it has been witnessed recently that even developing countries have started to securitize the migration issues occurring within their territories. It is the case of Nepal which has seen the Bhutanese refugees as a threat to its civil society, democratic stability and foreign policy (Baral 1993: 207). The consequence of this attitude has been a manifest unwillingness to integrate the ethnic Nepalis, which has also been felt by the interviewees:

In Nepal there is no chance of integration because the Nepalese government is not interested to do that.... (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

UNHCR (2004) takes resettlement into consideration only in the absence of other options, such as voluntary repatriation and local integration. The decision of being resettled made by the refugees is an option of last resort. As they repeatedly say, they did not really choose it, but they were forced to do it:

[I]n the end there was really no choice for us than to choose resettlement and contacted UNHCR and IOM for the process.... I was forced to choose this option as a solution. (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

There was not solution for us so I choose to be resettled.... [W]e had to live somewhere in the planet, then America proposes to take us, then UNHCR also followed this line, then some more countries joined it. I chose to be resettled here. (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

Surprisingly, almost all the interviewees did not welcome the resettlement option as the relief to their plight, but as the loss of hope of regaining their country:

I was surprised and felt so sad to hear it. At that time I felt like the land where I was standing was going under the water.... Our fight to go back has ended up with tragedy.... We lost the hope that we will never get back our land. (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

The Ethnic Nepalis started to apply for resettlement between 2007 and 2008. The awareness that repatriation is hampered by Bhutan causes a definitive disillusionment. But at the same time, it encourages the refugees to choose resettlement as a durable solution to their plight.

“For how long we should keep living a frustrated life in the camp....”

All the refugees interviewed spent a minimum of eighteen years in Nepal’s camps, “waiting, waiting” (Haslev, 4 May 2011), with the hope of being allowed one day to go back to Bhutan. After that hope has faded away, discouragement gave place to anger: “Everybody turned aggressive because of this decision”, “and a lot of people had an emotional breakdown” (Haslev, 4 May 2011). In their accurate report about the Bhutanese refugees, HRW (2007: 51) explained the anxiety in the camp as a consequence of the lack of information regarding the resettlement offer. According to the interviewees, they were in need of reliable answers but what they got was uncertainty:

It was in the end of 2006. Yes I heard that we will be resettled in a third country but we did not know anything on that issue. We had a kind of uncertainty about where they were going to take us, how they will take us and how will be the situation of all our family members, so it was a kind of uncomfortable situation. (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

The major concern of the interviewees was the division of their family:

We had a fear: our beloved family will be resettled in the same country or not? (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

“Where will our parents be?” and “Where will we be?” — these were the kinds of fear we had. (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

Although political activity is banned in the UNHCR-administered camps, in his analysis of Tanzania’s Lukole refugee camp, Simon Turner (2010: 128) has pointed out how “the camp paradoxically became a space which was at once depoliticised and hyper-politicised”. As reported by HRW and mentioned by one of the Bhutanese in Haslev, a group of people identified with the Bhutan Maoists were very politically active in Nepal’s camps. Little is known about them, but if we put Turner’s (2010: 110) notion in practice, that a “story based on rumours doesn’t make it less valuable” because rumours are “structuring principles” of the life in the camp, according to the rumours, the Bhutan Maoists were opposed to the resettlement offer from the very beginning, worried that it will undermine their fight for repatriation (HRW 2007: 61). As a consequence, they started to intimidate all the refugees who wanted to choose to

be resettled, accusing them of betraying the cause of Bhutan, and menacing them with retaliation (HRW 2007: 65-67). Our interviewees attested to this:

[T]here was a group of people who belongs to the Bhutanese Maoist Peoples' Party, who forced us to say that we will fight for our land and we will be back to Bhutan. People were thus scared to open their mouth in public and say: "we are going to choose resettlement". (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

The fear to speak their mind added concern to the decision of choosing resettlement for their future life (HRW 2007: 67-68).

We chose on purpose not to ask any questions regarding the life of the refugees in the camps, thinking that this topic falls beyond the purpose of this paper. However, throughout the interviews, more than one has recalled the past experience in Nepal, and it turned out that to break with a life of frustration in the camps was one of the main reasons that motivated the Bhutanese to opt for resettlement.

Most of them wanted to end an unstable life:

I experienced a lot of ups and downs in my life while we were in the camps in Nepal. We had always such a horrible and uncertain situation in the camp that we wanted to end up somehow ... and don't want any more an uncertain life. (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

The oldest had enough of a life of privation:

When I was in the camp in Nepal, they provided us 5 kg of rice for two weeks, what can I do with 5 kg of rice? We had a very hard time there. There was not sufficient medical treatment and medicine.... (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

The cultured wanted to end a life of idleness:

[W]e spent our valuable career development time in camp with scarcity and uncertainty. (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

The youngest wanted to finally develop their capabilities:

You know, we spent a very important part of our life in the camps, with uncertainties and a future in the dark. This drove us to come here. In the camp, we don't have any future. We did not have any possibilities to build our career.... (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

"Hope for the future...."

Amartya Sen's (2005: 152) compelling idea of setting free people's capabilities as a way to ensure basic human rights fits very well the condition of the Bhutanese refugees. What made the life of the refugees so hard to endure within the limbo of the camps is in fact the deprivation of the right to develop their capabilities. This explains why the refugees who answered our interviews considered the resettlement to a third country the only feasible solution to build up their skills and their future.

According to the data collected by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)⁸, Denmark is one of the first five countries in the world to pursue a policy of gender equality and women's empowerment. It was not by accident that three out of four women interviewed affirmed that:

Probably I will be able to develop my capabilities here better than in the camps in Nepal or Bhutan because Denmark is a country where everyone is equal by gender. (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

The Bhutanese who are now in their thirties—single or newly married—call the "future generation" what who are forty and fifty and already have sons call

“children”. The right to ensure a better life for their children is in fact one of the priorities that made the refugees choose resettlement:

[W]e decided to be resettled for our kids’ future.... [O]ur children can have a better future and better ‘facilities’ in general. (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

Even if most of the refugees have never heard of Denmark before having set foot on Haslev:

When my son filled out the form to go to Denmark, I asked him: “Are you filling up the form to go where?” and he replied to me and said: “Denmark”. This was the first time I heard about Denmark.... I did not know about this country, just a little. When I was in the camps, I was interested in sports and in 1998 Denmark was in the World Cup Final and that was the first time I heard about it. (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

Denmark is for most of them the right place to start over. After having lived in the chaos of the camps, the first thing to impress the Bhutanese resettled in Haslev is what they refer to as “system”:

When I arrived in Denmark, I was impressed by the overall system and environment.... I like the environment of Denmark, I mean [everything] is nice and clean. (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

The 41 Bhutanese all reside in the same neighbourhood but in different buildings where Danish families and families of different nationalities also have their own apartment. Being integrated into the local community is highly appreciated by the Bhutanese interviewed:

[W]e don’t feel any kind of segregation or separation from the Danish community. We live all together.... The Danish government is doing pretty well in order to make us a part of this society. (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

As part of the society, the refugees can finally have the means to accomplish the reason of their resettlement: a better future for them and for their children in an environment that allows setting their capabilities free.

“Being a citizen and delete refugee status...”

The leitmotiv of the interviews collected is the need of the Bhutanese refugees to be stripped of their refugee label. Stateless for the past 20 years and unable to assert any of their civil and political rights, the refugees’ choice of being resettled is not exclusively utilitarian, but is also justified by the necessity of having their legal status restored. The Bhutanese want to throw away the label that generalize them as ‘refugees’ and finally get an individual identity as ‘citizens’ (Neuwirth 1988: 34):

It was our last option to be citizens, where we can have our new identity so that we will be able to remove our refugee tag. How long can we live as refugees? (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

Durga Parsad Adhakari, 41 years old, after so many years in the camps of “non-enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights”⁹, has founded the ‘Dansk-bhutanesiske kulturforening’ (Danish-Bhutanese Cultural Centre)¹⁰ with the intention of making the Haslev community cognizant of Bhutan and its refugees¹¹. Although Mr. Adhakari might have a high political profile (he has been arrested for having taken part in the mass demonstration of 1990 and spent 22 months in jail in inhumane conditions¹²), he does not act as a spokesperson for the Bhutanese cause.

Kamal Koirala, 34, brother-in-law of Adhakari and active member of the cultural club, in answer to the question: “Are you in contact with the Bhutanese People’s Party?” said: “Yes I know it but I am not in touch with them politically. I am not interested in politics” (Haslev, 4 May 2011).

Nevertheless, the Bhutanese interviewed are aware that the visibility of the resettlement process put them under the international spotlight:

Now we are spread around the world so we will have more chance to raise our voice against the Bhutanese regime, to let the world know the injustices done by the Bhutanese regimes to us. I guess our action will be much more effective than it was before. (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

The resettlement made the Bhutanese more aware of their rights as citizens and as human beings:

I guess the Bhutanese government won’t take us back because those who have been resettled in a third country will know more about democracy, human rights, freedom. (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

I will be back to Bhutan only if the Bhutanese government will welcome us and give freedom, liberty, democracy; then it will be ok to go back there. (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

Repatriation is still the hope that almost all the refugees cling to, together with the consciousness that what they learned in Denmark could help the development and the democratization of their own country:

If I see any Drukpas from Bhutan I will tell them: “Don’t lose your face putting your citizen out of their country. Take them back and make them happy and use their skill to develop Bhutan!” (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

... [U]se their resources and make our country a developed country. (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

Despite having been expelled from Bhutan, the Bhutanese do not have any feeling of hatred for their country.¹³ On the contrary, they embody exactly what Kunz observes: “These refugees identify themselves enthusiastically with the nation, though not with its government” (Kunz 1981: 42).

I don’t feel any hatred to the country. You know, country and soil are never going to be your enemy but your enemy is going to be the regime, I do hate the Bhutanese regime and not Bhutan. (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

... I still feel that Bhutan is mine and hope I will get it one day. (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

The Bhutanese already went through a process of reconciliation with their past (IDEA 2003: 19), that will ease them to get on with their future life.

Our Findings and the Bhutanese Refugees’ Motivations

Our findings suggest four essential reasons why Bhutanese refugees chose resettlement as a durable solution to their PRS:

- Impossibility of repatriation;
- End to a life of frustration in the camps;
- Hope for a better future;
- Need for restoring a citizen identity instead of a refugee one.

On these grounds, we will firstly argue that the Bhutanese refugees in particular, and the refugees in general, are not passive victims as they are usually depicted. Secondly,

we will show how the resettlement does not conclude with the arrival of the refugees in the host country, but actually continues in the host state.

The refugees are usually portrayed as *homo sacer*, which is defined as ‘bare humanity’ (Agamben 1998). They have not only been stripped of their citizenship but also of their human identity to simply become what Simon Turner (2010: 50) calls “universal object of humanitarianism”. However, the experience of the Bhutanese refugees shows that although denied of their basic human rights, they can still make use of their right of choice. The power of the refugees to *choose* their future counters their general victimization¹⁴ and gives them back their humanity.

The decision of our interviewees to be resettled is conscious and motivated by the above-mentioned four reasons. The refugees are not passive spectators of their life, but effective actors, as their desire to end their frustrated life in the camps gives evidence. The will to expand their capabilities after years of forced idleness is shown by the wish of a better future for them and their children. The search for a place, which is not “exceptional” as intended by Turner (2010: 43), “a parenthesis in time and space, where refugees are kept on ‘standby’, neither in one nation nor the other”, becomes, eventually, a concrete resettled country where they can delete their statelessness and enjoy their citizenship rights.

Nevertheless, it is also important to look behind this romantic idealism and look at the difficulties of the resettlement process. After years in the camps where they had very little control of their life, and after being totally dependent on the support of the international community, the initial settlement period asked the refugees to learn the basic skills to attain economic self-sufficiency as basis for a new social identity (Neuwirth 1988: 35). This first phase is usually called ‘economic adaptation’¹⁵ or ‘occupation adjustment’ and generally lasts three years. The Bhutanese interviewed had been resettled in Denmark between the middle of 2008 and the beginning of 2009; consequently, at the time of the interviews, neither of them had finished the ‘adaptation’ period yet. Kamal Koirala, thanks to his language proficiency in English and Danish, is the only one of the Bhutanese who already has a regular job with a regular salary, while all the refugees are in ‘praktik’ (“internship”):

I am appointed to the Job Center of the Haslev Municipality as an Integration Staff. There are six elderly Bhutanese who have difficulty in communication while they are in ‘praktik’. ‘Praktik’ means a place where they go mainly to learn spoken Danish and get knowledge of the Danish work market. When they are in praktik they learn Danish through conversation with their Danish friends at work. I visit 10 different praktik places to get the information about how the praktik is going. My main work is to translate them when they have difficulty in communication. (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

The language is, for many of the refugees interviewed, one of the most difficult problems to overcome in their integration process:

I don’t know the language, and this is so embarrassing to me and frustrating. I am an illiterate woman so I have great problem to learn it. (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

At the beginning of their new life in Denmark:

We got all kind of assistance from a local group called ‘helpinghand’.¹⁶ They took us to market and teach us how to do shopping, what to buy and so on. It was easy. They guide us to do everything, even if we had great difficulties in managing and running our daily lives. (Haslev, 4 May 2011).

But, as noted by Kunz (1981: 46-47): “In a linguistically strange environment the refugees might find themselves excluded and isolated from human contact, and their

loneliness may result in depression or even in paranoid hallucinatory reaction". Umakanta Adhakari, 65 years old, confessed that:

...when I arrived here, my first six months were horrible. I was so depressed. I couldn't fall asleep. I did not want to eat anything. I had to use antidepressants. (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

The same experience with the 50-year old Krishna Maya Neupane:

Then when I came here I found myself in the middle of the desert where there is nobody except me. I don't know my destination, where I am going. I am feeling completely lonely in this planet. It's because of the language and the rest of my family members [who live away from here]. (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

To keep the family united is *a priori* condition in large-scale resettlement programs. However, the concept of family needs to be culturally regarded. In the 'Western' countries, only immediate family members are eligible for being resettled together, without considering the trauma that this will cause for South Asians who are used to living in extended, not nuclear, families (Neuwirth 1988: 32):

UNHCR should have allowed the rest of the family to come to Denmark too but it did not happen. Some of my family members are in the USA and some others are still in the camps in Nepal... Our family is divided into many countries. Now some of my family is in Australia, some others in Canada and some in Bhutan, now we are everywhere. (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

Fortunately, the void of an extended family is filled by a 41-people community sharing the same language, traditions, lifestyle, religions and food habits that, according to Kunz (1981: 47), will accelerate the integration within the new country. Being surrounded by elements which allow an "identification" with their former country is extremely important for the refugees, because most of their problems depend on "their emotional link" with their home country (Kunz 1981: 42):

... my place of birth that comes into my memory all the time. (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

The ethnographic examples offered by Lisa H. Mallki (1992) would be helpful to support our argument that the resettlement does not end with the arrival of the refugees to the host country, but, instead, continues along with the acclimatization of the refugees into the host state.

In her field research in Tanzania, Mallki compared two different groups of Hutu refugees who fled from Burundi, one settled within the borders of a refugee camp and the other in a township. While the refugees in the camp "saw themselves as a nation in exile", the refugees living in the township were entirely integrated in their new premises as "cosmopolitan" citizens (Mallki 1992).

Away from considering the life of the Bhutanese resettled in Haslev similar to that of a refugee camp, it is interesting to note that the three-year phase of 'economic adaptation' corresponds to a process of resettlement which is unfinished. The attachment of the Bhutanese to their culture is justified by the need of a familiar surrounding but, at the same time, shows their feelings of being out of place. Krishna Maya Neupane, 50, complains that:

I can't perform my cultural and religious activities... I can't do my cultural activities exactly how I was used to do in Bhutan or in Nepal due to the lack of typical materials and lack of our priest. My parents memorial day, for example, normally we perform special religious activities either at my home or at a temple which is almost impossible to find it here. This makes me so frustrated. I would like to do all the tradition or cultural ceremonies according to our previous style and with all the religious practices, but it is not possible here. It is my practical period so I am working in a canteen where I

have to clean lots of things which contains remains of beef and other kind of meat, but I definitely can't accept it because of my tradition. I can't touch and eat beef according to my cultural and religious belief but now I have to do it. (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

They are still entrapped in what Mallki defines "a construction and reconstruction of their history as 'a people'". As a country, Bhutan has lost its earthly borders to become a mythical place, an idealized "heaven":

I feel that Bhutan is like mountains and rivers. I have never been myself there.... Sometimes my grandfather talked about Bhutan. I can imagine that Bhutan has big mountains, difficult roads, big forests like that. (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

These are the images associated to Bhutan of Yogesh Adhakari and Aakash Tamang. Respectively 12 and 13 years old, both born in the camps, they have never been to Bhutan, whose memory is exclusively constructed on the words of their grandparents.

However, it is necessary to specify that the way the refugees perceive the country left behind, differs from person to person, as well as different is the perception of the cultural incompatibility in the resettled country (Kunz 1981: 42). Age plays an important role (Kunz 1981: 42). Mrs. Neupane cannot easily accept that her sons, all of them over 18, live in a different apartment:

Our family way of life is collective; we all live up to the third generation under the same roof. We have one kitchen and we have dinner all together but when I came to Denmark, I found that my two sons and my daughter have their own apartment and me and my husband have a different one. It's strange for us, it's very strange.... (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

On the other hand, Mrs. Neupane's son, Govinaa Neupaney, 22, does not actually dislike this:

Here in Denmark we should be more independent. (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

Govinaa will start to study to become a nurse in December 2011. He met his girlfriend, a Bhutanese girl resettled in Middelfart, on Facebook. In answer to the question: "How do you see yourself in 10 years?", he said:

I see myself with a family, settled down here for the rest of my life (Haslev, 4 May 2011)

In sum, the preceding discussion has led us to the following conclusions:

- The choice of the refugees to be resettled restores them the dignity of subjects. They are finally able to help themselves, rather than being the object of help (Turner 2010: 50).
- Resettlement does not finish with the arrival of the refugees but proceeds with the country of destination and is epitomized by the 'occupation adjustment' period.

We are aware that, in order to consider our study complete, it remains to be seen how the Bhutanese refugees will perceive the resettlement after three years of 'economic adaptation'. We hope to explore this aspect in our future research.

Conclusion

Our paper ends with an answer to its title “Why is the resettlement in a third-country the chosen solution by the Bhutanese refugees?” There are four *personal answers* that explain the reasons behind the choice of being resettled, namely:

- Impossibility of repatriation;
- End to a life of frustration in the camps;
- Hope for a better future;
- Need of restoring a citizen identity instead of a refugee one.

We see these answers as the four stages the refugees went through from losing the hope to regaining it. These are four steps that brought them from expulsion from their own country to the acceptance of resettlement.

Going back to Bhutan is the last wish of most of the refugees, but the denial of the repatriation becomes at the same time what sparks their decision to be resettled. The wish of an idealized past turns into a wish of a concrete future where the *refugee* can finally change into a *citizen*. The resettlement is surely an extreme solution that tears the refugees from a familiar, but geographically and culturally closed country of first asylum to a foreign third country. The resettlement process is long and difficult, and lasts even after the arrival in the host country. But in the case of the Bhutanese refugees, it will probably conclude an impasse that has been protracted for more than twenty years.

The answers of the Bhutanese explain *why* 80 per cent of the refugee population in Nepal’s camps welcomed the resettlement as a solution to their long-term encampment and plague. The personal motivations of the refugees have actually coincided with the solution chosen by the international community. Beside the resignation due to the impossibility of pursuing other solutions, the resettlement has been voluntarily decided by legal and moral duty bearers who can finally use their right of choice. Certainly, they demonstrate that a participatory solution, which is not imposed but chosen, can empower them and set them free.

Notes

1. The incumbent King of Bhutan, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, is a Ngalog (HRW 2007:12).
2. After that, thousands of ethnic Nepalis were forced to flee, the Bhutanese government resettled Drukpas on the land previously inhabited by the ethnic Nepalis. As a consequence, the term Lhotshampa does not exclusively refer to the ethnic Nepalis, but also include the Drukpas living in Southern Bhutan. In the course of this paper, we will use the definition of ‘ethnic Nepalis’ instead of ‘Lhotshampas’ to avoid confusion.
3. If we look at the data reported by the *Bhutan-Denmark Partnership-Strategy for Development Cooperation 2008-2013*, it is shown clearly that “India is Bhutan’s largest trading partner by far, accounting for 77.2% of exports and 68.7% of imports in 2006. Hydro power exports to India were still the most important export, accounting for 26.5% of total exports in 2006” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs-Danida 2008: 12).
4. According to Bhutan’s legislation, the act of defaming King-Country-Government is also criminal (HRW 2007: 45)
5. Human Rights Watch pointed out that there is no difference between the first category of Bhutanese and the second, because they both should be entitled to return to their own country as established by the international law. Amnesty International underlined that, although signatory of only the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Bhutan is in any case bound by the International Customary Law and by the international consensus to protect and respect the

- basic legal standards and human rights of its citizens (HRW 2007: 42; Amnesty International 2000: 7).
6. See <http://www.ambkathmandu.um.dk/en/menu/DevelopmentCooperation/SupportToRefugeesFromBhutan/>, accessed on 23 May 2011.
 7. According to the Lutheran World Federation, as of 11 May 2011, 46,000 plus refugees have been resettled so far.
 8. See http://www.oecd.org/document/0,3746,en_2649_201185_46462759_1_1_1_1,00.html, accessed on 31 May 2011.
 9. Executive Committee Conclusion on Identification, Prevention and Reduction of Statelessness and Protection of Stateless Persons (No. 106 (LVII) - 2006).
 10. See Frivilligruppen i Haslev at <http://www.flygtinghaslev.dk/>, accessed on 21 May 2011.
 11. Egon F. Kunz (1981:51) has analyzed how groups “which in their history had long experience of minority life, after settlement, tend to form communities with emphasis on friendship, customs, self-help and ethnic identity”.
 12. “It was a horrible situation that I am not able to express in words but it was an extreme inhuman behavior shown by the regime. None human basic needs were provided to us. They took me in custody on 7 November 1991, because I took part in the rallies where we asked for human rights and peace. I spent 22 months in custody. They put us most of the time in toilet without giving us enough food or water. We were around 35 people. We were constantly interrogated, physically abused; they pee on us and give electric shock. I didn’t feel that I would stay alive. I was released after that ICRC visited us a couple of time at the Chengoun jail in Thimpu.” (Haslev, 4 May 2011)
 13. In almost all the houses we visited, a picture of the incumbent King of Bhutan Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck hung on the wall. They said to us that they still recognize him as ‘their king’ but they wish he would not have the executive power as it is the case of the Danish constitutional monarchy.
 14. Christie Shrestha, a MSc student of Kentucky University, in her Master’s thesis ‘Power & Politics in Resettlement: A case study of Bhutanese Refugees’ has analyzed the resettlement process of the Bhutanese refugees in USA. Although the American environment described by Shrestha has been more hostile to the refugees and the resettlement more difficult compared to what we have analyzed in our paper, our conclusions are identical.
 15. One of the roles of the Lutheran World Federation Nepal is to provide useful vocational training to selected refugees before their resettlement so that they can use their new skills at the place of destination. Probably because the Bhutanese interviewed were among the first group of Bhutanese to be resettled, they did not receive any kind of training in the camps.
 16. See *helping-hands.dk* at <http://www.helping-hands.dk/>, accessed on 12 November 2011.

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